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Follies of the Human Potential Movement:

THE NEW NARCISSISM

by Peter Marin

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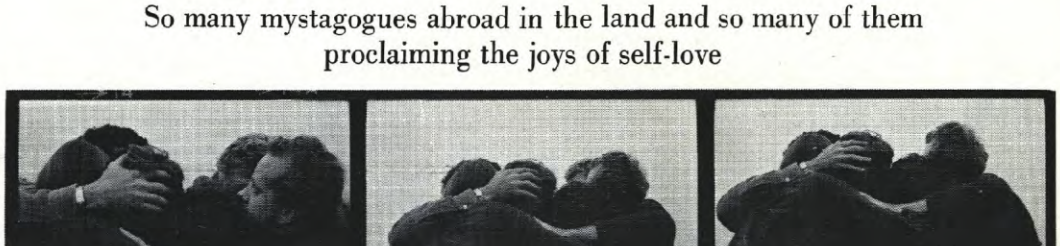
Peter Marin

THE NEW NARCISSISM

So many mystagogues abroad in the land and so many of them proclaiming the joys of self-love



Paul Fusco/Magnum

WHERE TO BEGIN a piece like this? Its original subject was ostensibly an Esalen conference on "spiritual tyranny." But that was for me merely a way of getting at a more general subject: the trend in therapy toward a deification of the isolated self. And that subject was in turn a part of an even more general concern: the ways in which selfishness and moral blindness now assert themselves in the larger culture as enlightenment and psychic health. A broad-based retrenchment is going on, a pervasive and perhaps unconscious shift in value—not only on a national level but in the moral definitions and judgments we make as individuals.

I think offhandedly as I write of several recent conversations I have had with friends or students, of what I have heard proclaimed from lecture platforms or seen on television and in the popular journals. I am, for instance, dining with a close friend in a New York restaurant, and as we eat our steaks and drink our brandy and smoke our fat cigars he explains to me that the world is obviously overpopulated, and that somebody must starve, and that we, as a nation, must decide who it will be, and that it might as well be those who already suffer from protein deficiency, for they are already "useless." Or I finish a lecture to the members of the American Association for Humanistic Psychology, and a therapist rushes up to me afterward and asks me whether or not I believe in the "ethics of the lifeboat," and when I tell her that I don't know why we are in the lifeboat while others are drowning, she whispers knowingly to me: "We have a higher consciousness." Or I am invited to meet with a well-meaning California legislator who is beginning a political movement based on the therapeutic values of "authenticity" and "warmth," and he draws for me on a napkin the button he has designed: the single letter *I* on a blank white background. Or I attend a dinner sponsored by the Population Institute at the Century Plaza in Los Angeles, where Paul Ehrlich addresses a thousand well-heeled people about the "coming end of affluence," and when I leaf through a copy of his book given away for free I see that he recommends filling the cellar with food and buying a gun and relying on neither friends nor neighbors but only on oneself. Or, finally, I lis-

Peter Marin is the au thor of In a Man's Tim *(Simon and Schuster)*

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ten for two hours in a graduate seminar to two women therapists explaining to me how we are all entirely responsible for our destinies, and how the Jews must have wanted to be burned by the Germans, and that those who starve in the Sahel must want it to happen, and when I ask them whether there is anything we owe to others, say, to a child starving in the desert, one of them snaps at me angrily: "What can I do if a child is determined to starve?"

That, precisely, is what I am talking about here: the growing solipsism and desperation of a beleaguered class, the world view emerging among us centered solely on the self and with individual survival as its sole good. It is a world view present not only in everything we say and do, but as an ambience, a feeling in the air, a general cast of perception and attitude: a retreat from the worlds of morality and history, an unembarrassed denial of human reciprocity and community.

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I went to dinner at the house of a woman who had just been through a weekend of *est* (Erhard Seminar Training), the latest and most popular new therapeutic enthusiasm. The training is designed to provide its participants with a new sense of fulfillment and competence, and it seemed to have worked with my hostess, for she assured me that her life had radically changed, that she felt different about herself, that she was happier and more efficient, and that she kept her house much cleaner than before.

est
Erhard Seminars Training

"Sometimes people get the notion the purpose of est *is to make you better. It is not. I happen to think that you are perfect exactly the way you are.... The problem is that people get stuck acting the way they were instead of being the way they are"—Werner Erhard*

Nothing in that is very startling or distressing, but in the course of the evening she also added that because of the training she now understood: (1) that the individual will is all-powerful and totally determines one's fate; (2) that she felt neither guilt nor shame about anyone's fate and that those who were poor and hungry must have wished it on themselves; (3) that the North Vietnamese must have wanted to be bombed, or else it could not have happened to them; (4) that a friend of hers who had been raped and murdered in San Francisco was to be pitied for having willed it to occur; (5) that in her weekend at *est* she had attained full enlightenment; (6) that she was God; (7) that whatever one thought to be true was true beyond all argument; (8) that I was also God, and that my ideas were also true, but not as true as hers because I had not had the training; and (9) that my use of logic to criticize her beliefs was unfair, because reason was "irrational," though she could not tell me why.

There is no telling whether or not this is precisely what she learned at *est*, and no doubt other adherents would deny it, but I have talked by now to at least a dozen of its enthusiasts, and each one of them has blankly recited to me, word for word, the same ill-taught and ignorant catechism. No doubt they were happier for the teaching; invariably they expressed complete satisfaction with their newfound philosophy. Like my hostess, they had learned it all in a kind of manufactured daze at a weekend which cost them $250, in the company of hundreds of others. By now more than 50,000 people have "taken" the training, which was developed by Werner Erhard himself, who was once known simply as Jack Rosenberg,* and who was a trainer for a short time with Mind Dynamics, a franchise operation that trained businessmen in humane managerial techniques. *Est* itself is a step past all that. It is a mixture of ideas and techniques borrowed from the behavioral sciences, Eastern philosophy, the traditional American classroom, Marine boot camp, and modern brainwashing methods. Participants at the weekend workshops are bombarded from the lectern with simplistic truths while being simultaneously bullied and soothed by an army of attendants. They are prevented from leaving their seats to stretch or eat or go to the bathroom, and if—as sometimes happens—they throw up in their places or urinate on themselves, well, that is all part of the training.**

It is not hard to understand how it all works, and one need only read the first few pages of Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* to see what intelligent use Erhard makes of individual confusion. He has managed to compress into one activity half a dozen techniques for creating power over others: the underlying anxiety of the audience and its need for simple order; the strangeness and power of the extraordinary situation; the gradual befuddlement of the senses; the combined effects of repetition and fatigue; the credulity of others near you; the manufactured impotence of the audience; the masochistic relief that results from placing oneself in the hands of a man to whom one has granted omnipotence.

Clearly Erhard has a genius—not only for the efficiency with which his program is organized and sold, but also for the accuracy with which he tells his audience what it wants to hear. It is the latter which binds them to him. The world is perfect, each of us is all-powerful, shame and guilt are merely arbitrary notions, truth is identical to belief, suffering is merely the result of imperfect consciousness—how like manna all

* Space does not permit a discussion of the implications of that one act: the conscious shift from a Jewish to a Germanic name while still in the shadow of the deaths of several million Jews.

** I should make one thing clear. I have never been to an *est* weekend, mainly because I have never been able to subject myself to the kind of treatment *est* visits upon its participants, or to listen to the kind of nonsense it offers them.

of this must seem to hungry souls. For if we are each totally responsible for our fate, then all the others in the world are responsible for *their* fate, and, if that is so, why should we worry about them?

Narcissism as a state of grace

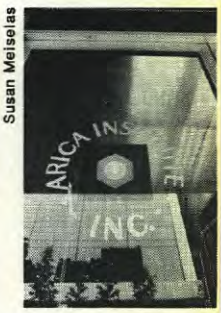
IT IS ALL SO SIMPLE and straightforward. It has the terrifying simplicity of the lobotomized mind: all complexity gone, and in its place the warm wind of forced simplicity blowing away the tag ends of conscience and shame. It offers the kind of Orwellian enlightenment an age like ours is bound to produce, but I do not spell it out in detail or mock its enthusiasts for that reason alone, or even because it marks the dead end of human desire or generosity. *Est* is, after all, only a bit worse than our other popular enthusiasms, and it is interesting in part because it makes clear so much of what is hidden in them. It is in many ways the logical extension of the whole human potential movement of the past decade. The refusal to consider moral complexities, the denial of history and a larger community, the disappearance of the Other, the exaggerations of the will, the reduction of all experience to a set of platitudes—all of that is to be found in embryonic form in almost all modern therapy.

Yet compared to *est* the older therapies (such as Gestalt therapy or Abraham Maslow's self-actualization or Rogerian encounter groups) had a kind of innocence to them. They were, at their worst, merely boring or silly. The people drawn to them were obviously moved by a simple yearning for what was missing from their lives, and if that yearning took sometimes puerile forms or excluded moral concerns or genuine passion, that seemed excusable—like the play of children. But our newer therapies take upon themselves a new burden. Whereas the older therapies merely ignored moral and historical concerns, the new ones destroy or replace them. They become not only a way of protecting or changing the self, but of assessing the needs of others and one's responsibilities to them—a way of defining history and determining morality.

Why that happens is not difficult to understand. It reveals the impulse behind much of what we do these days: the desire to defend ourselves against the demands of conscience and the world through an ethic designed to defuse them both. Most of us realize at one level of consciousness or another that we inhabit an age of catastrophe—if not for ourselves then for countless others. Try as we do, we cannot ignore the routine inequities of consumption and distribution which benefit us and condemn others to misery. Each of us must feel a kind of generalized shame, an unanswerable sense of

"The new therapies provide their adherents with a way to avoid the demands of the world, to smother the tug of conscience."

Susan Meiselas



Arica concentrates on the total development of the human being. The training focuses on developing and unifying the body, mind, and emotions.

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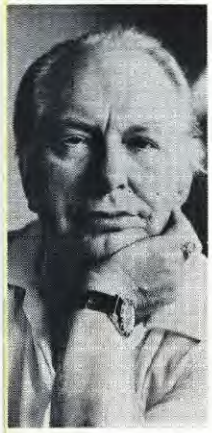
guilt. So we struggle mightily to convince ourselves that our privilege is earned or deserved, rather than (as we must often feel unconsciously) a form of murder or theft. Our therapies become a way of hiding from the world, a way of easing our troubled conscience. What lies behind the form they now take is neither simple greed nor moral blindness; it is, instead, the unrealized shame of having failed the world and not knowing what to do about it. Like humiliated lovers who have betrayed what they love, we turn our faces from the world, if only (in Paul Goodman's phrase) "just to live on a while."

That is what makes our new therapies so distressing. They provide their adherents with a way to avoid the demands of the world, to smother the tug of conscience. They allow them to remain who and what they are, to accept the structured world as it is—but with a new sense of justice and justification, with the assurance that it all accords with cosmic law. We are in our proper place; the others are in theirs; we may indeed bemoan their fate or even, if we are so moved, do something to change it, but in essence it has nothing to do with us.

What disappears in this view of things is the ground of community, the felt sense of collective responsibility for the fate of each separate other. What takes its place is a moral vacuum in which others are trapped forever in a "private" destiny, doomed to whatever befalls them. In that void the traditional measures of justice or good vanish completely. The self replaces community, relation, neighbor, chance, or God. Looming larger every moment, it obliterates everything around it that might have offered it a way out of its pain.

The end result of this retreat from the complexities of the world is a kind of soft fascism: the denial, in the name of higher truth, of the claims of others upon the self. Our deification of the self becomes equal in effect and human cost to what Nietzsche long ago called the "idolatry of the state." Just as persons once set aside the possibilities of their own humanity and turned instead to the state for a sense of power and identity no longer theirs, so we now turn to the self, giving to it the power and importance of a god. In the worship of the state, life gives way to an abstraction, to the total submission of individual will. In the worship of the self, life also gives way to an abstraction, in this case to an exaggeration of the will. The result in both cases is the same. What is lost is the immense middle ground of human community. The web of reciprocity and relation is broken. The world diminishes. The felt presence of the other disappears, and with it a part of our own existence.

The real horror of our present condition is not merely the absence of community or the isolation of the self—those, after all, have been part of the American condition for a long time. It is the loss of the ability to remember what is missing, the diminishment of our vision of what is humanly possible or desirable. In our new myths we begin to deny once and for all the existence of what we once believed both possible and good. We proclaim our grief-stricken narcissism to be a form of liberation; we define as enlightenment our broken faith with the world. Already forgetful of what it means to be fully human, we sip still again from Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, hoping to erase even the memory of pain. Lethe, lethal, lethargy—all of those words suggest a kind of death, one that in religious usage is sometimes called accidie. It is a condition one can find in many places and in many ages, but only in America, and only recently, have we begun to confuse it with a state of grace.



"A civilization without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where Man is free to rise to greater heights, are the aims of Scientology.... We seek no revolution. We seek only evolution to higher states of being for the individual and for Society."

—L. Ron Hubbard

Hopeless questions

IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT that the Esalen conference on Spiritual Tyranny becomes significant. It was called two years ago in San Francisco by the Esalen staff as a response to the movement they had helped to start. What apparently bothered them about the movement was connected to what I have mentioned here: the proliferation of sects and cults, and an attendant willingness on the part of many persons to abandon individual responsibility in favor of submission to narrow and shallow creeds or therapeutic "masters." The speakers invited were men whose names are familiar to those who read Esalen's catalogues: Claudio Naranjo, Werner Erhard, George Leonard, Sam Keen, Jerry Rubin—all of them leaders of therapeutic schools or theorists of what George Leonard has rosily called "the coming transformation of humanity." As for the several hundred members of the audience, some had come to cheer their favorite gurus on and others merely to be present at what had taken on, in therapeutic circles, the nature of a celebratory *event*—the equivalent of an all-star rock concert. But there were other reasons for coming, too. Many people in the audience seemed to be looking for a direction to their lives, and they had come to the conference for the same reason that they had attended workshops in the past: to find help. The human potential movement had still not done for them what it had promised; their lives had remained the same or perhaps had worsened, and the new world, the promised transformation, seemed very slow in coming.

So they came in a peculiar mood, one that combined equal parts of celebration, yearning, and anger. But their mood was further com-

plicated by the conference's taking place at the beginning of the Arab oil boycott. The audience had recently been made aware of the possibility of a world unlike the familiar one in which they felt privileged and safe. To many of them the future must have seemed frightening, and, standing on the stage and looking out at them, one could feel in the air and see on their faces the early signs of a collective paranoia, as if they were haunted by visions of the world's possible vengeance. Packed into the huge hall, its walls lined with gigantic posters of therapeutic heroes—Fritz Perls, Wilhelm Reich, Abraham Maslow, and others—the crowd was restless, impatient, volatile; one could feel rising from it a palpable sense of hunger, as if these people had somehow been failed by both the world and their therapies. It made one apprehensive—not for any specific reason, but simply because beneath the ruffled but still reasonable surface of the crowd lay a hysteria that would in other settings take on any one of several forms, none of them particularly pretty. They wanted someone to set matters right again, to tell them what to do, and it did not matter how that was done, or who did it, or what it required them to believe.

Most of the people in the audience were followers or clients of the various speakers, and as each one spoke his adherents responded with cheers and applause. Others, at odds with the speaker, answered with catcalls, whistles, or groans. I remember in particular the words "total obedience" and "submission to a perfect master" and "the adolescence of rebellion"—phrases which were used by several speakers and which drew from the crowd a surprising amount of acclaim. But even the speakers who took a stand against submission or obedience seemed somehow to diminish the world of experience and choice. In their words, too, there was a tyrannical refusal to acknowledge the existence of a world larger than the self, the total denial—by implication—of the necessity of human community or relation.

That missing element defined the conference and determined its nature: a massive repression all the more poignant because so much of the audience's feeling was engendered by the world denied. Their relation to that world—what it was, what it ought to be—lay at the heart of their discontent, but it was never spoken of. Even when they began to question the speakers, the questions they asked were invariably concerned with themselves, were about self-denial or self-esteem, all centered on the ego, all turned inward. Behind that, of course, they were asking about something else, about problems for which they had no words, about the proper human relation to an age of catastrophe. But neither they nor the speakers were capable of recognizing that fact, and so those problems remained unarticulated, and they hung in the room like shadows and ghosts, determining the tone of the event but never permitted to enter it.

As I listened, I kept thinking about a conversation I had recently had with a man much taken with mysticism and spirituality. He was

"One could see on the faces of those in the audience the early signs of a collective paranoia, as if they were haunted by visions of the world's possible vengeance."

Reverend Sun Myun Moon is the founder o the Unification Churc an international Chri tian movement whic places all religious en phasis on family rel tionships.

Marc Rattner/Black Star

telling me about his sense of another reality.

"I know there is something outside of me," he said. "I can feel it. I know it is there. But what is it?"

"It may not be a mystery," I said. "Perhaps it is the world."

That startled him. He had meant something more magical than that, more exotic and grand, something "above" rather than all around him. It had never occurred to him that what might be calling to him from beyond the self were the worlds of community and value, the worlds of history and action—all of them waiting to be entered not as a saint or a mystic, but in a way more difficult still: as a moral man or woman among other persons, with a person's real and complex nature and needs. Those worlds had been closed to him, had receded from consciousness as he had ceased to inhabit them fully or responsibly or lovingly, and so he felt their ghostly presence as something distant and mysterious, as a dream in which he had no actual existence.

Hare Krishna emphasizes Krishna consciousness—the process of developing one's dormant love of God by engaging one's mind and body in serving and glorifying God.

Captains Marvel and Castaneda

I SAW THAT AT WORK the first night of the conference and I saw it again, in greater detail, the next day at the various workshops. I remember one in particular: a seminar on astral travel held in one of the local churches. In the huge reaches of the church the few dozen participants seemed dwarfed and lost as they gathered around the altar and the first few pews. Their voices echoed in the empty space as they rose one by one to testify as to how they had left their bodies while asleep, or how their friends had, or how they had heard about someone who had. The tone was one of strained yearning, a combined will to believe and be believed, as if by sheer force of conviction they could bring into being a new world to replace the old one. They spoke about "space cadets" and "soul traps" and the ethics of psychic power, and after a while they shifted ground and spoke about the possibilities of using such power to get things changed in Washington.

"We'll get to the President while he's asleep," said someone. "We'll infiltrate his dreams."

"But that isn't right," said someone else. "That's tyranny, too. We can't intervene without his consent."

"It doesn't matter," said a third. "It won't work anyway. I've a friend who knows someone who tried it. He left his body and went to the White House. But he couldn't get in. The President has astral bodyguards. They know what's what in Washington."

So it went, a series of exchanges making of the world of possibility a comic-strip cosmology. It was both absurd and sad: the exchanges and the pain implicit in them conveyed the participants' anguish at their own powerlessness. I thought automatically of the mysticism rampant in Germany in the Thirties, or of the passion for shamans and mystics in prerevolutionary Petrograd, or of the Christian zealots in declining Rome. The seminar seemed to mix aspects of all three, and the church was a fitting place for it, for the participants were like lost pilgrims trying to create, in its shadow, a new faith to replace the one they had lost. The last remaining shreds of reason and hope mingled with emergent superstition and fantasy, and the end result was neither moral action nor a complex vision of the world, but a child's garden of absurdities, an impotent dream of power. Confronted by a world in which casual goodness was no longer sufficient as a response, the participants were groping for a way to restore to themselves a power and significance they could no longer feel. In this particular instance the salvationary course they took involved astral travel and psychic power, but it might just as easily have been *est* or scientology or submission to Guru Maharaj Ji or even a doctrinaire adherence to Reich's orgasm theory. As different as all those enthusiasms are, they have a common ground; behind them all is a sense of exhaustion, the bourgeois will to power mixed with impotence, and the ache of no longer feeling at home in the world.

Perhaps the best example of all this is the immense popularity of Castaneda's works about don Juan. What they offer the yearning reader is precisely what I am talking about here: the dream of an individual potency to be derived magically from another world. In essence it is an updated version of the Protestant dream of the salvation of the soul, and the important thing about the power celebrated within them is that it occurs neither in the actual polis nor in the company of significant others. It is found, instead, in a moral and human desert, a fictitious landscape emptied of comrade or lover or child, of every genuine human relation (save that of master and disciple) in which joy or courage might actually be found.

Castaneda's myth of don Juan is not an alternative to our condition, but a metaphor for it. It is simply the familiar myth of the solitary gunslinger translated into spiritual language, the comic-strip story of Superman or Captain Marvel made into a slightly more sophisticated legend for adults. It legitimizes our loneliness and solaces us with the myth that we can, in our isolation, find a power to make ourselves safe.

Contrast, for a moment, Castaneda's barren mysteries with the work of Lévi-Strauss, for whom the world of magic and myth is always a *human* world, a realm explored and inhabited by others like ourselves. For Lévi-Strauss the

crucial human moment is not the moment of separate awareness; it is the moment of human meeting, in which the other's existence creates for us a sense of the depth and complexity of the world. That, precisely, is what is missing from Castaneda's world. We forget, reading it, that almost without exception the visionary experiences of Indian cultures are a collective work, prepared and defined and sustained by the community, by a world view which is, in effect, the product of cooperative labor. Visionary experience leads not only to the gods and into the self, but it also binds one to the world of myth and—through symbology and tradition—to the historical and social worlds. The individual seeker, though sometimes solitary, is never alone on the quest; the journey occurs within a landscape maintained inwardly by generations of men and women, and the experience is a wedding to them all. Come back from their vision quests, the American Indians recited their newly made poems or sang their songs to the tribe, feeding back to it the shared truths of a solitude that was *not* separate, but shared.

Look, for instance, at the words of Black Elk, the visionary Indian leader, close to death and addressing the gods: "Hear me, not for myself but for my people. Hear me in my sorrow, for I may never live again. Oh, make my people live."

Make my people live! The tale in this instance is not of power but of love—not only for the gods or the self but for the world of others, those whose presence creates for the self a body as truly one's own as the flesh. That love, that sense of lived relation, is at the heart not only of tribal lore, but at the center of the legends of most cultures. One thinks of Odysseus surrounded by comrades seeking to return to his home, or of Gilgamesh driven to seek the secret of immortality by the death of Enkidu, his friend. Both of them are moved by what lies behind all myth and long-lived culture: the felt sense of relation and reciprocity. Indeed, that reciprocity is identical to culture: a collective creation and habitation of value sustains what we carelessly call the "individual" self. But that, in our dream of power, is what we no longer remember. It disappears from our myths, it vanishes from our therapies, and we come to the worlds of mystery much as we came long ago to the new world: with greed and fear rather than awe and love. In the name of power we strip it of everything real, and it becomes nothing more than a reflection of our need.

What is lost in that whole process is a crucial part of our own human nature, our unacknowledged hunger for relation, what might be called "an appetence for Good": the needful reaching out for a life in a larger world. We are moved toward that world by the inner force Freud sometimes called Eros: the desire for relation is as much at work in our need for community and moral significance as it is in our need for coupled love.

Writing about the Athenian polis, Hannah Arendt said about the Greeks:

> *The principal characteristic of the tyrant was that he deprived the citizen of access to the public realm, where he could show himself, see and be seen, hear and be heard, that he prohibited the* agoreuein *and* politeuein, *confined the citizens to the privacy of their households. . . . According to the Greeks, to be banished to the privacy of household life was tantamount to being deprived of the specifically human potentialities of life.*

The same thing is true for us. To put it simply, it is as if each of us had at the same time a smaller and larger self, as if we inhabited at the same moment a smaller and larger world. The smaller world is the one familiar to us, the world of the individual ego and "interpersonal" relations, a reality acknowledged by our habits of thought and by our institutions and therapies. But we also inhabit a larger and unrealized world, one in which every gesture becomes significant precisely because it is understood to bind us to the lives of invisible others.

THE NATURAL DIRECTION of human ripening is from the smaller to the larger world, is toward the realization and habitation of ever-widening realms of meaning and value. Just as the young are moved from the inside out through increasingly complex stages of perception and thought demanding corresponding changes in their environment, so, too, adults are moved from inside themselves through increasingly complex stages of relation: past the limits of ego and into a human community in which the self becomes other than it was. Seen in this way, human fulfillment hinges on much more than our usual notions of private pleasure or self-actualization, for both of those in their richest forms are impossible without communion and community, an acknowledgement of liability, and a significant role in both the polis and the moral world. To be deprived of those is to be deprived of a part of the self, and to turn away from them is to betray not only the world but also the self, for it is only in the realms in which others exist that one can come to understand the ways in which the nature of each individual existence is in many ways a collective act, the result of countless other lives.

The traditional image for what I am talking about has always been the harvest: the cooperative act in which comrades in a common

"The power celebrated in Castaneda's work is found in a moral and human desert, a fictitious landscape emptied of comrade or lover."

Paul Fusco/Magnum

Esalen Institute offer programs in education philosophy, and the be havioral sciences whici are designed to reaci toward a greater self awareness and whici emphasize the poten tialities and values o human existence.

field gather from it what they need. One finds the image repeated in the work of Camus, Giono, Kropotkin, Lawrence, Silone, and many others, but the most vivid example I know is the scene in *Anna Karenina* in which Levin labors in a field with the peasants, losing all sense of himself in the shared rhythms of the work, the deep blowing grain, and the heat of the sun on his body. It is an image of ecstatic relation which is as much an expression of Eros as is the emblem of two lovers tangled in embrace, and it can stand for almost every aspect of our lives. Every privilege, every object, every "good" comes to us as the result of a human harvest, the shared labor of others: the language we use and the beliefs we hold and the ways we experience ourselves. Each of these involves a world of others into which we are entered every moment of our lives. Idly, for instance, we take coffee and sugar in the mornings, and even that simple act immerses us immediately in the larger world. Both the sugar and coffee have come from specific places, have been harvested by specific persons, most probably in a country where the land belongs by right to others than those who hold it, where the wages paid those who work it are exploitive and low. No doubt, too, the political system underlying the distribution of land is maintained in large part by the policies enacted and the armies acting in our name—and the reason we enjoy the coffee while others harvest it has nothing to do with individual will and everything to do with economics and history.

Shadows of neglect

THAT, I BELIEVE, is what each of us already knows—no matter how much we pretend we do not. Our lives are crowded with the presence of unacknowledged others upon whom our well-being and privilege depend. The shadows of those neglected others—dying in Asia, hungry in Africa, impoverished in our own country—fall upon every one of our private acts, darken the household and marriage bed for each of us. We try to turn away, but even the desperate nature of our turning is a function of their unacknowledged presence, and they are with us even in the vehemence with which we pretend they are not. Something in each of us—even among the enthusiasts of *est*—aches with their presence, aches for the world, for why else would we be in so much pain?

The question of the age, we like to think, is one of survival, and that is true, but not in the way we ordinarily mean it. The survival we ordinarily mean is a narrow and nervous one: simply the continuation, in their present forms, of the isolated lives we lead. But there is little doubt that most of us *will* survive as we are, for we are clearly prepared to accept whatever is necessary to do so: the deaths of millions of others, wars waged in our name, a police state at home. Like the Germans who accepted the Fascists, or the French citizens who collaborated with the Germans, we, too, will be able to carry on "business as usual," just as we do now. Our actual crisis of survival lies elsewhere, in the moral realm we so carefully ignore, for it is there that our lives are at stake.

Seen in that light, what might one expect from a therapy a grown man or woman might take seriously? First, a simple willingness to accept the existence of an objective reality equal in significance to the self, a reality which literally (as my friend John Seeley likes to put it) *objects* as we try to act upon it. Second, a recognition that much of our present pain is the world's pain, the result of living in a catastrophic age in which we do violence to the best parts of our nature. Third, a consciousness of the natural force within us which demands a moral, political, and historical life in the larger world. Fourth, a humility in the presence of that larger world, a respect for the human meaning gathered there by others struggling both in the present and in the past. Finally, a recognition that the future depends directly upon the ways we act individually and in community; that it will never be more just, humane, generous, or sustaining than we ourselves are willing to be; and that the therapist and client, in the solitude of their encounter, create together—in how much of the world they admit to their discourse—a part of the social reality others will later inhabit.

Physicists sometimes use a lovely word, *elsewhere*, to describe the realms of being which we can postulate in thought but can never enter or demonstrate to exist. It is as if they existed side by side with the known world but were beyond all human habitation or touch. In a sense, *elsewhere* also exists in the moral realm, for whatever we fail to love or inhabit fully fades into it, is like a ghostly presence around us, a reality we vaguely remember or intuit, but which is no longer ours. Thus, in a very real way the nature of the shared human world does depend on our actions and words, and we can destroy it not only with bombs, but through our failure to inhabit it as fully and as humanly as we should. That, in part, is what Freud had in mind, decades ago, when at the very end of *Civilization and Its Discontents* he called for a resurgence of "eternal Eros" in its timeless battle with Death. Now, half a century later, Eros is not yet among us. Whether it ever will be is still an open question. But if the answer to that question is to be found anywhere, it will not be in our popular therapies or creeds like *est* or Castaneda's myths. There, where self is all, Eros can have no life. □